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ABSTRACT

The health of arts and sciences programs on U.S. campuses is addressed in this open letter to President Reagan by the director of the Council for Liberal Learning of the Association of American Colleges (AAC). Concern is expressed that the proposed federal budget cuts will exacerbate the erosion of resources available for teaching and research. At stake is the quality of instruction and scholarship in the arts and sciences and the morale of students and faculty. Crucially important is funding specifically directed at higher education, including student aid and research support; equally important are those areas that indirectly affect the health of liberal education, such as tax policies. Associated with the decline in federal support for the arts and sciences is an erosion in public confidence and commitment to liberal learning. A recent survey of the career decisions of Phi Beta Kappa members and Rhodes Scholars documented that throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s fewer outstanding students decided to pursue teaching and scholarship. Since 1970 the number of students majoring in English has declined by 57 percent, in philosophy by 41 percent, in history by 62 percent, and in modern languages by 50 percent. Attached to the letter is an AAC news release describing it and also describing the Council's purposes: to provide responsive leadership on critical issues of educational policy and to demonstrate the contributions of liberal education to society. (SW)

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OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT REAGAN ON FEDERAL SUPPORT OF CAMPUS ARTS AND SCIENCE EFFORTS

Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.

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Association of American Colleges
1818 R Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009
202/387-3760

January 2, 1985

President Ronald Reagan
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear President Reagan:

I would like to introduce you to a new organization in the American higher education community -- the Council for Liberal Learning. We recently were created by the Association of American Colleges to represent individuals on campuses across the country as well as in business and the professions who are committed to the enhancement of liberal education through the core arts and sciences.

Since both you and Mrs. Reagan attended liberal arts colleges, I know that you are sensitive to the important contribution which liberal education makes to the quality of one's life and appreciate the role of liberal learning in the future of the United States. In its concern for the future, the Council for Liberal Learning has taken as a main goal displaying the contribution of liberal education to society and sharing with you and others engaged in public life our assessment of the current status of liberal learning in our society and our understanding of the probable impact of public policy decisions on the arts and sciences.

In that spirit, I would like to take this opportunity to give you some information about the state of affairs on campus as they affect the arts and sciences and then flag some issues which you will be facing as you proceed through your agenda during the next year. The Federal Government has a narrowly defined role in dealing with many of the factors affecting liberal education -- and rightly so. But many of the decisions of the Federal Government not aimed directly at liberal learning nonetheless have a serious and unanticipated impact on its health.

Two current realities most influence the health of the arts and sciences on American campuses: first, the erosion of resources available for teaching and research has affected the quantity and quality of instruction and scholarship in the arts and sciences. Just as important, a

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serious loss of conviction about the value of the arts, the humanities and basic science to our society has led to a deterioration of morale among students and faculties. It has dissuaded a growing number of the best and brightest students from entering these fields as students and future teachers and practitioners.

The data supporting these conclusions are overwhelming. The continuing erosion of overall faculty income -- approximately 20% since 1970 -- has halted but not been reversed. Many faculty now have great difficulty in maintaining middle class life styles. This overall erosion has masked an even steeper decline in the relative salaries of arts and sciences faculty when compared, on campus, with salaries in applied disciplines such as computer science and management and when compared with salaries in the professions. Support for research and creativity in the arts and humanities, as well as in mathematics and the theoretical sciences, is also lower in real terms than it was in the early '70s.

Evidence of the decline in confidence and commitment to liberal learning are even more disturbing. A recent survey of the career decisions of Phi Beta Kappas and Rhodes Scholars clearly documented that throughout the '70s and into the '80s fewer and fewer outstanding students decided to enter teaching and scholarship. The perceived decline of societal support and reward for the profession of higher education is discouraging our best minds from taking up the challenge of advancing the frontiers of knowledge.

Recent studies of student choice of majors indicate that students have overwhelmingly moved in the last ten years to management, engineering, and computer science and away from majors in the humanities and pure sciences. In the humanities alone, the number of majors in English has declined by 57%, in philosophy by 41%, in history by 62%, and in modern languages by 50% since 1970. More disturbing still, the students who are taking the vocational majors are spending less time than in the past taking courses in the liberal arts. Survey data also indicate that the same undergraduates have diminished concern about their responsibilities for service to society and are preoccupied with how they will earn a living and maximize their own rewards.

These trends have generated great concern about the quality and future of undergraduate education generally and in the liberal arts in particular. Indeed, your Department

of Education in its recently issued report Involvement in Learning communicated its concern about these very issues. In the last month, the National Endowment for the Humanities released its report on the precarious state of learning in the humanities on campuses. In a few weeks the higher education community itself will, through the Association of American Colleges, report its assessment of the state of undergraduate education and call for attention on all campuses to its improvement. All of these reports -- Involvement, the NEH report, and the about-to-be-released AAC report -- endorse greater attention to liberal education and assert the need for both national and campus leadership to improve the health of the arts and sciences.

The Federal Government has no role in deciding the actual curriculum of universities and colleges. Nor, I might add, do the states. Universities and colleges differ from the public schools -- institutional autonomy and faculty academic freedom are the hallmarks of their quality. But the Federal Government can support quality on campus. It can do so by providing thoughtful political leadership, reporting statistical realities, providing resources for important programs in the arts and sciences, and insuring that no global changes in Federal policy adversely affect liberal education.

I would like to comment on the latter two means of support from the Federal Government for the arts and sciences. The Federal Budget is not organized to allow those making decisions in the Executive Branch or in Congress to understand the implications of their decisions for the arts and sciences. Over the next few years, we in the Council look forward to remedying this problem by analyzing the impact of the Federal Budget on liberal learning. In the meantime, the budgets of the Department of Education and the agencies supporting basic research such as the Endowments, NIH, and NSF are central concerns. At a minimum modest increases in those budgets are essential to rebuild our research base. Student aid appropriations are also critical to the health of the arts and sciences. Since most university budgets are tuition-dependent or enrollment-driven, the wide availability of student aid enhances both the overall quality of higher education and the provision of equal opportunity.

Congress's movement to reauthorize the Higher Education Act will provide an important opportunity to improve the role of Federal support for quality in liberal learning. Although most of the reauthorization debate has centered on

the student-aid formula, other issues are critical to the future strength of the arts and sciences. New authorizations in international studies, foreign languages, the humanities, libraries, and other such areas of the arts and sciences could provide small but critical amounts of categorical aid which can generate new and improved learning opportunities for students across the country. In the debate about reauthorization, the Council for Liberal Learning will provide you and Congress with detailed recommendations for the non-student aid provisions of a new higher education act.

The Council's second area of concern -- policies formulated not for higher education but more generally -- is more difficult to elucidate but requires careful monitoring by the Executive Branch and Congress. I shall offer two illustrations: tax policy and general budget cutting.

Four areas of tax policy have substantial impact on liberal education -- taxation of fringe benefits, the charitable deduction, the proposed non-deductibility of state and local taxes and the marginal tax rate. It is essential that investment in learning by both corporations and individuals be exempted from taxation and that the standards for exemption in no way be tied to narrow vocational relevance. A narrow interpretation deprives us of significant investment in the capital with the greatest payback in efficiency and effectiveness -- human capital. The charitable deduction is a major source of private investment in higher education and is absolutely essential to the liberal arts. Unrestricted endowment for colleges and universities provides the modest margin for excellence in most institutions. No changes in the tax code should compromise the charitable deduction. The proposed non-deductibility of state taxes will undoubtedly place new pressure on state funding of public institutions and state supported student aid for both public and private campuses. Campuses are only now beginning to emerge from severe financial circumstances and any new pressure on an important source of funding puts quality at risk. Finally, if tax reform reduces the marginal tax rates, then a new form of charitable tax credit is in order, since past reductions in the marginal tax rate have more substantially reduced the rate of charitable giving in the higher tax brackets.

No one will argue against the importance of reducing the Federal budget deficit. But it is essential that the cuts in Federal programs not be a reduction in the investment in the future of the United States. Every dollar

invested in student aid, for example, will be returned many times over in Federal tax receipts and in the improved productivity of the student receiving such aid. Investment in pure research is the necessary condition for future scientific discovery and for better understanding the human condition. More importantly, the cost of support for both educational opportunity and research productivity must be understood as the tithe for a free society.

I hope that you will keep in mind the issues raised here as you move to final decisions concerning your legislative program and the budget you will be recommending to Congress. As we now officially begin business as the Council for Liberal Learning, we invite people from all walks of life to join us as individual members to support liberal education and the core arts and sciences. We anticipate thousands of our fellow citizens joining us as we cooperate with the institutional members of the Association of American Colleges. We expect to be the voice of liberal education in the policy process.

I would like to invite you and Mrs. Reagan to join us as colleagues working together to advance liberal learning.

If the Council for Liberal Learning or I personally can be of assistance as you formulate your policies for universities and colleges, please let me know. From time to time I shall be writing you on behalf of the Council about specific policies which have implications for liberal education. I look forward to cooperating with you in advancing the quality of the arts and sciences and thereby contributing to the freedom and the quality of life of present and future generations.

Sincerely,

R. J. Spitzberg

Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.
Executive Director
Council for Liberal Learning

aac NEWS RELEASE

January 2, 1985
For Immediate Release

Contact: Peggy Ann Brown
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AAC COUNCIL CALLS FOR FEDERAL SUPPORT
OF CAMPUS ARTS AND SCIENCE EFFORTS

In an open letter to President Reagan, the executive director of the Association of American Colleges' Council for Liberal Learning today warned that the health of the arts and sciences programs on American campuses is at risk. Council Director Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr. expressed further concern that the proposed federal budget cuts will exacerbate the erosion of resources available for teaching and research and lead to a deterioration of morale among students and faculty. These factors are forcing the nation's brightest students to abandon the arts and sciences, according to Spitzberg.

"The cost of support for both educational opportunity and research productivity must be understood as the tithe for a free society," wrote Spitzberg. "Investment in pure research is the necessary condition for future scientific discovery and for better understanding of the human condition."

Spitzberg called on President Reagan to reflect on these issues as he prepared his budget recommendations for Congress. His concerns focused on funding specifically directed at higher education, including student aid and research support, as well as those areas which indirectly affect its health, such as tax policies.

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Associated with the decline in federal support for the arts and sciences, according to Spitzberg, is an erosion in public confidence and commitment to liberal learning. "The perceived decline of societal support and award for the profession of higher education is discouraging our best minds from taking up the challenge of advancing the frontiers of knowledge," wrote Spitzberg.

Spitzberg reported that a recent survey of the career decisions of Phi Beta Kappa members and Rhodes Scholars clearly documented that throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s fewer and fewer outstanding students decided to pursue teaching and scholarship. He observed that since 1970 the number of students majoring in English, philosophy, history, and modern languages has declined by 57 percent, 41 percent, 62 percent, and 50 percent, respectively.

Spitzberg's assertions come as national attention is being directed at the quality of baccalaureate education. On February 11 the Association of American Colleges (AAC) will release the findings and recommendations of its three-year Project to Redefine the Meaning and Purpose of the Baccalaureate Degree at its annual meeting in Washington, D.C. AAC's report details the minimum characteristics of a curriculum designed to meet the needs of the 21st century. Last fall studies by the National Institute of Education and National Endowment for the Humanities also reported on the serious problems in undergraduate education.

The Council for Liberal Learning, headed by Spitzberg, was established by AAC to provide responsive leadership on the many critical issues of educational policy facing the nation and to demonstrate the contributions of liberal

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education to society. The Council officially began operation on January 1. It represents individuals on campuses and in business and government committed to liberal education and the arts and sciences.

For a copy of Spitzberg's letter and additional information about the Council for Liberal Learning, contact Peggy Ann Brown at 202/387-3760, ext. 30 or 703/522-3076.

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NOTE TO REPORTERS: A press conference on the recommendations of AAC's Baccalaureate Degree Project is scheduled for 10 a.m. on Monday, February 11. Please note this change in time from an earlier release. Copies of the Annual Meeting preliminary schedule are available from Peggy Ann Brown, 202/387-3760, ext. 30 or 703/522-3076.